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October 24, 1961

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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

By: Dick Koogle 10-25-89
SUBJECT: NUCLEAR TESTS IN THE TRUST TERRITORY OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS

In response to a cable from Ambassador Stevenson, #1278, dated October 20, 1961, to the Secretary of State on the subject of the importance of avoiding nuclear tests in the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, a meeting was held in the office of Mr. Howard Furnas of the State Department on October 23, 1961. In addition to the undersigned, the following were in attendance:

Captain John J. Reidy, Office Secretary of Defense (ISA)
Mr. D. H. Nucker, Department of Interior
Mr. Richard Tiatano, Department of Interior
Mr. Austin Acly, Department of State, Office of Dependent Area Affairs
Mr. Curtis Cutter, Department of State, Office of Dependent Area Affairs

Mr. Nucker pointed out that the problem at the Eniwetok Proving Ground lies in the fact that there are approximately 11,000 people within a 600 mile radius of the test site. The relatively uneducated nature of most of these people means that it is practically impossible to get them to understand in any reasonable way the importance of nuclear weapons testing to the security of the United States and the free world. This problem was well recognized before the last test series was completed. About that time the Micronesians were not represented by effective legal counsel. Mr. Nucker pointed out that they are now well represented legally and he would expect that they would present an effective legal position if we resumed testing in the Eniwetok Proving Ground.

He made a strong plea that we should certainly use either Christmas Island or Johnston Island if feasible, and if it becomes a matter of choice he would prefer the Eniwetok Proving Ground over the Bikini Atoll. He argued that we should only test at Eniwetok Proving Ground if that is the only place we can do the type of testing required and that the required test is in fact vital to our security.

Mr. Acly discussed the legal situation and expressed some pessimism as to whether or not we have a legal position which could stand up under effective attack. He stated that although we may have a legal case we have not tried to argue it before the United Nations. He is of the opinion that a U.N. member would bring the case before the International Court of Justice. If this happens, Mr. Acly is not sure that we would be able to win the case, and in any event State would prefer not to have it brought up before that Court if it could possibly be avoided.

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Mr. Acly pointed out that since our administration of the Trust Territory is under the United Nations, our conduct of it must be brought before the U.N. and it must, therefore, be defended periodically. He stated that adverse world opinion with respect to testing would lead him to believe that even our allies would have no hesitancy in criticizing our administration of the Trust Territory if we choose to resume testing in that area. He agrees that we will suffer some of this criticism no matter where we resume testing, but feels that the criticism will be much more severe if the tests are at Bikini or Eniwetok. He based this judgment on the fact that there is very strong feeling in the U.N. to rush to the defense of dependent peoples.

Mr. Acly also pointed to the political problem that would be raised by others accusing us that we would be carrying out activities in the Trust Territory to the hazard of dependent people that we would not risk carrying out within the United States for fear of injury to our own people. He stated that we have a long term interest in the strategic importance of the Trust Territory and there is some possibility that our interests in that area would be seriously harmed if we are unable to maintain a favorable attitude on the part of the Micronesians themselves.

Mr. Nucker pointed out, as an example, that we may have a very considerable problem in the U.N. from the fact that we have had to relocate an entire community of some 84 people because of the requirement for a target impact area for the Pacific Missile Range.

It was the consensus of the group that we should look very carefully at the possibility of using either Johnston Island or Christmas Island, and only move to use the Eniwetok Proving Ground if the factors discussed above are outweighed by the considerations developed as a result of comparing the possibility of testing at the Proving Ground as against testing elsewhere.

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